Male qualities of lesbian ears back predisposition theories

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Researchers say they have found the first strong evidence of a physical difference between lesbians and straight women — a finding that the inner ears of gay women work more like those of men.

The discovery adds new support to the theory that sexual orientation may be predisposed before birth.

The origin of homosexuality has long been a matter of contention. Some believe it to be a matter of choice, but others — including many gay people — say it is not choice but biology.

Previous research has found that two parts of the male brain are different in gay and heterosexual men. Other studies have found that some genes

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Lesbians/ Hormones affect fetus

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differ between gay and straight men.

In the study to be published today in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, researchers at the University of Texas, Austin, said they found the inner ears of female homosexuals have undergone "masculinization," probably from hormone exposure before birth.

"Their auditory centers have been masculinized and the presumption is that so have the sites in the brain that direct sexual preference," said Dennis McFadden, the lead author of the study.

It has yet to be proven, however, that there is a specific site in the brain that directs women to be lesbians, he said.

Dr. Michael Bailey of Northwestern University said the research is "compelling" and may be "consistent with the biological origin of lesbianism."

"The most likely interpretation," he said, "is that this represents some kind of effect of early hormones on the developing fetus."

Bailey cautioned, however, that the research will not be accepted as valid until others replicate the experiment.

Sandra Witelson, an expert on brain anatomy and sexual orientation at McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, said the study supports the theory that lesbianism may be "related to early factors in brain development."

The inner ear difference between homosexual and heterosexual women was detected using a test that measures the function of the cochlea, a key sound amplifier in the inner ear, said McFadden, a professor of experimental psychology.

The cochlea amplifier in women is more sensitive than that of men, giving women an increased ability to detect very soft sounds in a very quiet room. The test measures a very slight sound that the cochlea makes when responding to a soft clicking sound.

Females, with their more sensitive cochlea, respond more powerfully to this test than do men, said McFadden. This is true even among infants.

To test for differences between the sexes, the researchers recruited more than 200 adults divided into four groups.

The results, McFadden said, indicated that lesbians had click-responses that were significantly weaker than those of heterosexual women. The signal was weaker still for all males, both gay and straight. Bisexual men and women were in the middle, although McFadden said there were not enough of these to draw firm conclusions.

What is clear, he said, is that there is a dramatic difference in the development of the hearing systems of lesbians and of heterosexual women. It also is known that development of the inner ear is affected before birth by androgens, a male hormone.

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Military force aut

USA Today

The U.N. Security Council on Monday endorsed a deal with Iraq over weapons inspections, warning Iraq of the "severest consequences" for violating the pact.

But the resolution dashed U.S. hopes for council approval of automatic military action should Iraq renege.

The 15-0 vote formally approved a deal negotiated last week in Baghdad between U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Iraqi President Saddam Hussein.

The accord opens eight of Saddam's presidential sites to U.N. weapons inspectors searching for prohibited nuclear, chemical and biological weapons and long-range missiles. U.N. officials said inspections could start within weeks, and diplomatic observers will accompany the inspectors.

Much of the council debate centered on what would happen if Saddam's regime goes back on its word. The United States and Britain wanted the council to authorize automatic military

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Buildings

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Scanlon says. It is also a means to obtaining the necessary funding to help preserve those buildings in a rapidly growing and changing city.

The Colorado territorial government established the deaf and blind school in Colorado Springs in 1874. The historic designation will add to the school's pride when it celebrates its 125th anniversary in 1999, says Marilyn Jaitly, the school's superintendent.

Cragmor Sanatorium and surrounding land, now the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs campus, is not quite as old as the school for the deaf and blind. But it plays a significant role in the region's history, says Missye Bonds, director of CU-Springs' Office of Sponsored Programs. Cragmor was a tuberculosis hospital from 1904 to 1962, a period when people from around the world discovered the healing benefits of the region's climate.

Both institutions were built on land donated by Gen. William Jackson Palmer, the city's founder and the benefactor for numerous philanthropic enterprises that he felt would enhance the city's development into a thriving, quality community.

In approving the historic designation, judges look for ties with well-known people. One such connection for the school for the deaf and blind was Jonathan Kennedy, the school's first superintendent. He was the grandfather of actor Lon Chaney, the "man of a thousand faces."

Chaney's mother, Emma Kennedy, was one of the first seven students at the school, and it is said Chaney learned many of his acting techniques